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Being LGBT in Asia:

A Participatory Review and Analysis of the Legal and Social Environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Persons and Civil Society

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By J. Scott Applewhite, AP

"U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance [will] promote and protect the human rights of LGBT persons."
President Barack Obama

"A historic shift is underway….The time has come."
UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

"When we see the abuse of those values [rights, equality and dignity] that are directed at the LGBT community, we have a moral obligation to stand in pride with LGBT individuals and advocates. We have a moral obligation to decry the marginalization and persecution of LGBT persons. And we have a moral obligation to promote societies that are more just, more fair, and tolerant."
Secretary of State John Kerry

"The United Nations Development Programme supports initiatives which promote understanding of the negative impact of homophobia and transphobia, and reduce human rights violations."
UNDP Administrator Helen Clark

Together, we can empower LGBT persons across the world, even in the most challenging environments. In doing so, we will advance our mission of building resilient, democratic societies—societies that give equal rights and protections to all of their citizens.
USAID Administrator, Rajiv Shah

U.S. Agency for International Deve opment
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"Being LGBT in Asia" is a ground-breaking, first-of-its-kind joint analysis conducted by USAID and UNDP alongside grassroots LGBT organizations and community leaders to understand the challenges faced by Asia's LGBT people. Guided by a Senior Asian LGBT Advisory Group, and implemented in eight focus countries and 10 additional jurisdictions, the initiative aims to educate and raise awareness among stakeholders about LGBT rights and the benefits of an inclusive approach to the development process.

APPROACH

The Review and Analysis methodology examines the LGBT experience in Asia from a Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) perspective, rather than through historic HIV lenses. It reflects the principles outlined in the USAID LGBT Foreign Assistance Strategy by drawing upon donor collaboration, innovative and participatory approaches to understanding the operating environment, utilizing multimedia and social media technology in new ways to urge creative dialogue, while empowering and educating stake-holders and development partners. The initiative also informs development policy and programming, and provides value added products to a range of USG and UN stakeholders and associated development partners.

POLICY BACKGROUND

President Obama and Secretaries Kerry and Clinton have declared that the advancement of human rights for LGBT people is central to the United States' comprehensive human rights policy and the realization of US foreign policy goals. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has noted that widespread abuse, violence and discrimination against LGBT persons around the world is a "monumental tragedy – a stain on our collective conscience" requiring renewed efforts to ensure that the human rights of all persons are protected. As a matter of international law and US policy, human rights apply to all persons, including LGBT individuals.

President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum on December 6, 2011 stating, "our commitment to advancing the human rights of all [LGBT] people is strengthened when we as the United States bring our tools to bear to vigorously advance this goal." With that Memorandum the President has instructed "all agencies engaged abroad to ensure that US diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of LGBT persons."

In an historic video address to the UN Human Rights Council, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recalled that it is the duty of the United Nations "to protect the rights of everyone, everywhere", speaking to LGBT people across the world that "any attack on you is an attack on the universal values the United Nations that I have sworn to defend and uphold."

CONTINUES >

OBJECTIVES

- *Build a knowledge baseline of the legal, social, political and institutional environments in which LGBT rights advocates and organizations operate while developing an understanding for the capacity of LGBT rights advocates to engage in policy dialogue and community mobilization.*
- *Promote understanding of the human rights of LGBT human persons, the challenges they face in terms of stigma and discrimination and steps toward LGBT-inclusive development within USAID, UNDP and Development Partners through research reports and multimedia products which convey results of the review and analysis work.*

OUTCOME GOALS

- *Increased knowledge and understanding on the state of LGBT civil society and LGBT civil society strengthening practices at national and regional levels in Southeast and East Asia, including:*
  a. *Sharing of knowledge on the state of civil society within the participating countries as well as internationally*
  b. *Common understanding of the legal and social environment shared by LGBT stakeholders*
- *Improved understanding of and capacity to advance the human rights of LGBT people and civil society by USAID, UNDP and development partners through LGBT-inclusive development and targeted development programming for LGBT civil society, including:*
  a. *Improved understanding, appreciation and sensitivity of challenges faced by LGBT people in Asia among staff of USAID, UNDP and development partner organizations*
  b. *Greater understanding and knowledge base from which future LGBT-inclusive development programming and targeted support to LGBT civil society can be planned and initiated*

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RESULTS

LGBT rights reviewed in 18 countries in Southeast and East Asia: 8 focus countries: Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam; and 10 other countries/ jurisdictions: Bangladesh, Burma, Taiwan, Hong Kong, S. Korea, Malaysia, Japan, Singapore, Timor Leste and Laos.

- Nine Communities of Practice Established – a regional network alongside eight communities of practice, one in each focus country.
- Eight National Dialogues Held – a total of 650+ LGBT activists consulted, representing 190+ organizations.
- Eight Country Reports Drafted – 50-100 pages each, covering LGBT rights in each focus country plus recommendations from the national dialogues.

Robust New Technology/Social Media Products:

- Two web-applications for mobile phone use developed for LGBT rights and HIV/AIDS support developed by a Filipino private sector company.
- Seven crowd-sourced, professionally produced videos – testifying to LGBT lived experience in eight Asian cities: Bangkok, Beijing, Kathmandu, Manila, Jakarta, Phnom Penh, Singapore
- Extensive "Being LGBT in Asia" internet presence – Crowdmap, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, QQ-tencent, Weibo (China) and Douban.
- A Google Drive LGBT knowledge database - includes 18 country bibliographies with scientific papers, journal articles and news reports.

Awareness-raising:

- "Being LGBT in Asia" presented to a total of 321 U.S. staff members at eight USAID missions and 14 U.S. Embassies.
- Several dozen USAID and State Department officers work to support "Being LGBT in Asia" in the eight focus countries, and also beyond.
- Eleven full-time UN volunteers at nine UNDP and one UNOHCHR country office. UNDP, UN Women, the UNOHCHR and the UN ESCAP all contributed staff and facilities.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

"Being LGBT in Asia" Regional Dialogue, February 2015 – over 200 LGBT people from 30+ Asia-Pacific countries to participate with academics and policy leaders in a landmark LGBT rights discussion, to be held in Bangkok, Thailand.

"Supporting LGBTI Human Rights Advocacy in Asia" – a 3-year project to jump-start LGBT civil society organizations so they play an effective advocacy role alongside other civil society actors. Work will continue engagement with USAID missions, US Embassies, the UN and other like-minded donors.